



KIRKMAN • LARSEN • LIEFELD • MCFARLANE • PORTACIO • SILVESTRI • VALENTINO

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IMAGE UNITED

CHAPTER TWO

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IMAGE UNITED #2 (of 6). December 2009. Published by Image Comics, Inc. Office of publication:

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Printed by World Color Press, Inc., St. Romuald, QC, Canada. 12/9/2009

International Rights Representative: Christine Jensen (christine@glystudio.com)



NEW YORK.



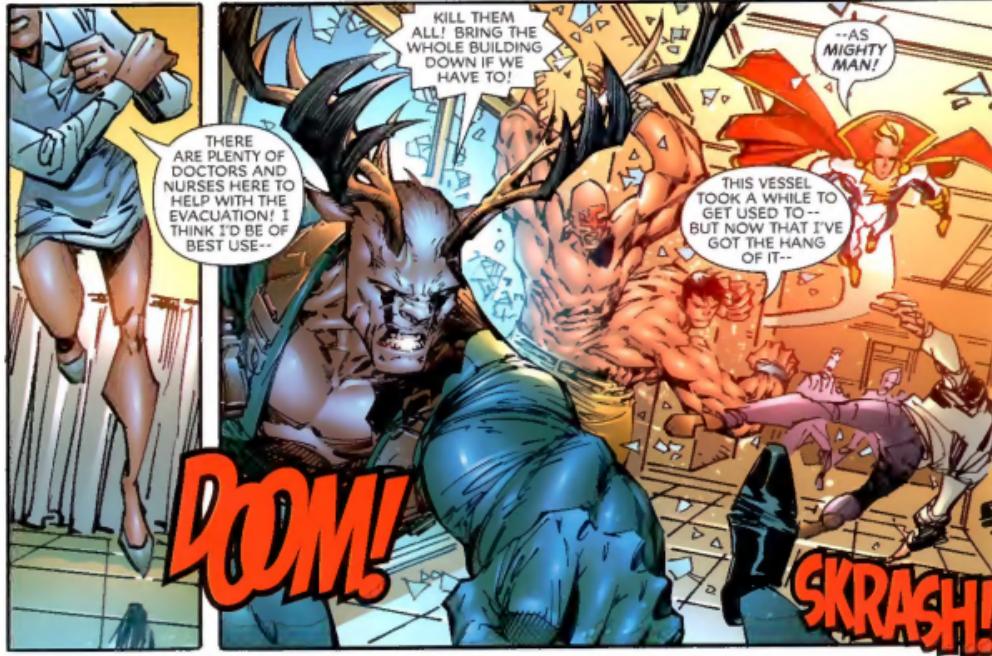




VOOPP!







LIBERTY ISLAND.

YOUNGBLOOD HQ.

LOOK, I KNOW I SOUND CRAZY, JUST--PLEASE. I SAW A WORLD IN RUINS-- A SHELL OF WHAT IT ONCE WAS. CIVILIZATION A DISTANT MEMORY. A GREAT POWER IS MOVING AGAINST US... I CAN FEEL IT GROWING...

THAT'S WHAT ALL THIS IS ABOUT... THESE ATTACKS.

I SAW OUR FINAL STAND AGAINST THIS THING. I THINK...

...I THINK WE LOSE.

YOU KNOW WHAT, FORTRESS? NEVERMIND-- WE DON'T EVEN KNOW WHO YOU ARE.

HOW CAN I BE EXPECTED TO TRUST YOU?

MY NAME IS BAXTER MONTGOMERY. I'M 23 YEARS OLD, I DON'T HAVE A CRIMINAL RECORD... AND I'M TRAPPED IN THIS SUIT.

I DON'T KNOW MUCH ABOUT IT--THIS IS ALL STILL VERY NEW TO ME. I THINK IT... **ABSORBS** ENERGY. LIKE, SOMETIMES LIGHTS FLICKER AROUND ME--AND I ABSORBED THE POWERS OF A SUPER-VILLAIN.*

WHAT'S HAPPENING NOW IS TOO MUCH OF A COINCIDENCE. I KNOW THESE VISIONS ARE REAL. THEY'RE COMING FROM THE SUIT...

...OR SOMEWHERE ELSE.

*SEE IMAGE UNITED #0.

UNTIL THEN--I'VE GOT LIVES TO SAVE!

NO! DON'T LEAVE ME IN HERE! RELEASE ME! YOU NEED ME!

YOU NEED EVERYONE!







CHICAGO.

BRAKKA!
BRAKKA!
BRAKKA!
BRAKKA!

EVERONE
STAY BACK--
THIS THING IS
MELTING
EVERYTHING IT
TOUCHES!

I'VE GOT
IT
COVERED!



BOY,
THEY WERE
RIGHT TO
CALL ME IN!
WHAT THE
HELL WAS
THAT THING,
SUPER-
PATRIOT?



WRAMM!









SEATTLE.



HUNTINGTON.



ST. LOUIS.



ORLANDO.

YOU'VE
JUST MADE
THE BIGGEST
MISTAKE
OF YOUR
LIFE!

OOH,
SCARY!

DETROIT.

KILL-CAT,
WHAT ARE
YOU DOING?!
WE JUST
GOT HERE!

PATHETIC!

GOT
HIM--
ON THE
ROPS!

LOS ANGELES.

DO YOU
HAVE ANY
IDEA WHO
YOU'RE
DEALING
WITH?

YOU'LL
SOON
FIND
OUT.

CHICAGO.



NEW YORK.





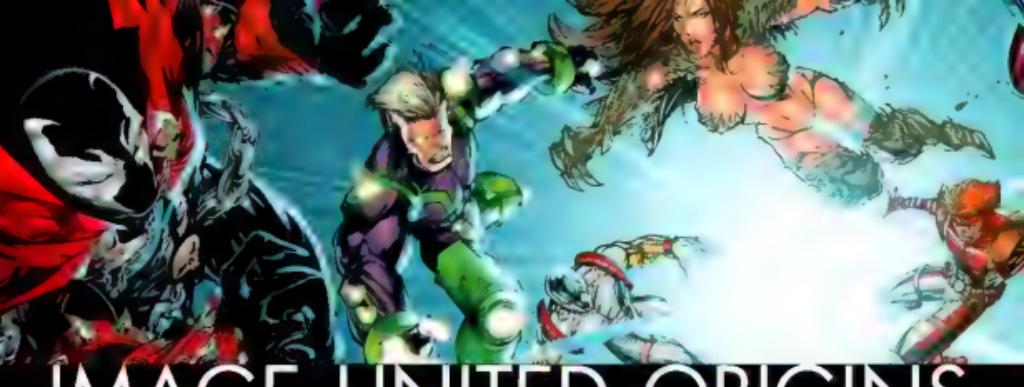


IMAGE UNITED ORIGINS

PART TWO

I first met Robert Kirkman at a barbecue in Chicago back in 2002. He was writing a *SuperPatriot* miniseries for Erik Larsen and was getting ready to launch the first issue of *Tech Jacket*. He'd also just turned in a pitch for a book he wanted to call "Bulletproof," but what he really wanted to talk about at that barbecue was why Image wasn't publishing *Battle Pope*.

In case you'd never heard of Robert before he launched *Invincible* and *The Walking Dead*, he was all about *Battle Pope* in the years leading up to those two books. Even though he'd published the book through his own Funk-O-Tron Studios, he was still eager to have it repackaged and reissued through Image – something he made very clear by sending copies and constantly cajoling then-Image Publisher Jim Valentino, Erik Larsen and myself. He was very enthusiastic.

And we loved him for it.

Robert was a big fan of Image. He was 13 when the company was starting up and the mass exodus of his favorite artists from Marvel had a tremendous effect on him. He picked up all the original series as they came out: *Youngblood*, *Spawn*, *Savage Dragon*, *WildC.A.T.s*, *CyberForce*, *ShadowHawk*. When the next wave of Image titles launched, Robert bought those, too. *Brigade*, *Supreme*, *Pitt*, *The Maxx*, *Bloodstrike*, *Stormwatch*, *Trencher*, *Gen 13*, *New Men*... all of them. Within the space of a couple years, he went from living and breathing Marvel Comics to not buying any of their books at all.

As Robert continued reading comics over the next couple of years, an idea began to take root: He wanted to write comics himself. Perhaps not surprisingly, given his enthusiasm for all things

Image, the actions of the Image founders served as his inspiration and he decided to start his career by creating and publishing his own comics.

Battle Pope – an extremely irreverent superhero parody – was his first foray into comics. Offensive by design, it was a love it or hate it series that nonetheless garnered a fair amount of interest and announced Robert as a burgeoning talent with plenty to say. After that came a *Battle Pope* spin-off, *Saint Michael*, and an anthology series called *Inkpunks Quarterly*. Then, in 2001, he launched a series called *Double Take*. Each issue featured two stories and by the end of the run, he was wrapping a Joe Casey/Charlie Adlard series that had begun at Image – *Codeflesh* – and debuting new work by the likes of Matt Fraction and Andy Kuhn.

But despite his success as a publisher, Robert wanted to be at Image.

Robert had met Erik Larsen at a convention in Chicago around then and they hit off. Erik liked *Battle Pope* and when Robert mentioned he'd like to see it re-published through Image, Erik encouraged him to send copies to Valentino. *Battle Pope* didn't make the cut then, but Robert kept trying. He talked to Erik and Jim about doing a new superhero series called *Science Dog*. Cory Walker was the artist on that, and everyone agreed it was an interesting concept... but still, nothing.

Instead, Erik gave Robert and Cory free reign on four issues of *SuperPatriot*.

Once pages from *SuperPatriot: America's Fighting Force* started coming in, things started moving a little faster. Within weeks, Jim and I were looking at a pitch for *Tech Jacket* – a teen sci-fi/superhero book drawn by E.J. Su – and when that was approved, Robert came back with everything from



IMAGE UNITED ORIGINS

sci-fi zombie comics to a repackaged *Battle Pope* series (of course) and then this "Bulletproof" thing.

"Bulletproof" was a great concept, but neither Valentino nor I cared for the title. Cory Walker was on board to draw this one, too, and the character designs looked great. Image had just published a graphic novel called *Bulletproof Monk*, though, and that had been made into a film, so Jim argued that a new book with such a similar title would be a mistake. We told Robert we wanted to do the book, but he had to change the title. So "Bulletproof" became *Invincible*.

And then came *The Walking Dead*...

A little less than five years, *Invincible* and *The Walking Dead*, had become two of Image's biggest titles. Sales on both the single issues and the trades were consistently going up and Robert's popularity had increased to the point that in 2007, we'd chosen to launch his newest series, *The Astounding Wolf-Man*, as our Free Comic Book Day title.

Along the way, Robert had gotten to know Todd McFarlane. Robert and Todd had decided to work a new title together after a panel at San Diego Comic-Con International in 2006 and over the course of the months that followed, Todd was able to get a firsthand look at just how committed Robert was to Image. Robert was doing work for other publishers, but for anyone who knew him, it was clear his values and goals were more aligned with those of the Image founders than anyone else in comics.

So it wasn't a surprise when Todd suggested that Robert be made an Image partner – not only the first addition to the partnership since the company was founded, but the first writer, as well. Everyone was unanimous in his support for the move: The idea had never come up before, because there'd

never been anyone as unequivocal in his dedication to Image before Robert. It was almost as though it was meant to be.

And talk about a rite of passage: Before Robert could even take stock of his new stake in the company he'd been a fan of as a teenager, both his talents as a writer and his long-time history as an Image fan were being put to use.

Once Erik Larsen had made his pitch for the project to Rob, Todd, Whilce, Marc and Jim, only one question remained. It wasn't so much, "Who's going to write it," though, as it was, "Is Robert down for this?" Just as everyone had endorsed Robert's partnership, so, too, was everyone convinced he was the *only* writer for *Image United*. No one else was even considered.

Given the amount of work this project requires, there are probably days when Robert wishes someone else – anyone else! – had been considered, but not many people get the chance to bring things full circle the way he has. In 10 years, he went from reading to writing Image comics, and in even less time, he's gone from being an enthusiastic upstart to one of the company's driving forces.

And if you were to ask Robert to reflect on all that, he'd probably tell you he's just getting started...



Eric Stephenson
Publisher

ongbyon nuclear reactor, north korea

IT'S MIDNIGHT IN
THE GARDEN OF GOOD
AND EVIL.

THERE ARE NO SHADES OF GREY IN
THIS BUSINESS. JUST GUYS IN BLACK
HATS AND GUYS IN WHITE HATS. IT
ALL DEPENDS ON WHAT SIDE OF THE
FENCE YOU'RE STANDING ON.

FROM WHERE I'M STANDING, I'M
ALWAYS WEARING A WHITE HAT AND
THE REST OF THE WORLD IS
WEARING THE BLACK HATS.



SOMETIMES THOUGH THE
GUYS WEARING THE WHITE
HATS HAVE TO GET THEIR
HANDS DIRTY. REAL DIRTY.

splooosh

CABOT STONE, FIELD-
COMMANDER, EXTREME FORCES,
BLOODSTRIKE DIVISION.
WEARING A WHITE HAT.

SECTOR 4
IS CLEAR.

CAMPS ARE LINED UP
FOR SLAUGHTER...

BLOODSTRIKE

MOW 'EM DOWN.

BLOODSTRIKE

Story
Rob Liefeld
Script
Mark Poulton
Art
Mark Mychaels
Jeremy Roberts
Mike Capparotti



BLOODSTRIKE: ASSASSIN.
THE FINEST KILLING MACHINE
MONEY CAN BUY.

BRAKKA!
BRAKKA!

BY ALL ACCOUNTS, BIG FELLA
SHOULD CREEP ME OUT. HE'S
ME, AND BY ME... I MEAN
HE'S MY CLONE.

Pieces of me,
re-constructed,
re-mastered and cooked up
for maximum damage.



WATCHING HIM CLEAR A ROOM
ALWAYS CHOKES ME UP.
NEARLY MOVES ME TO TEARS.



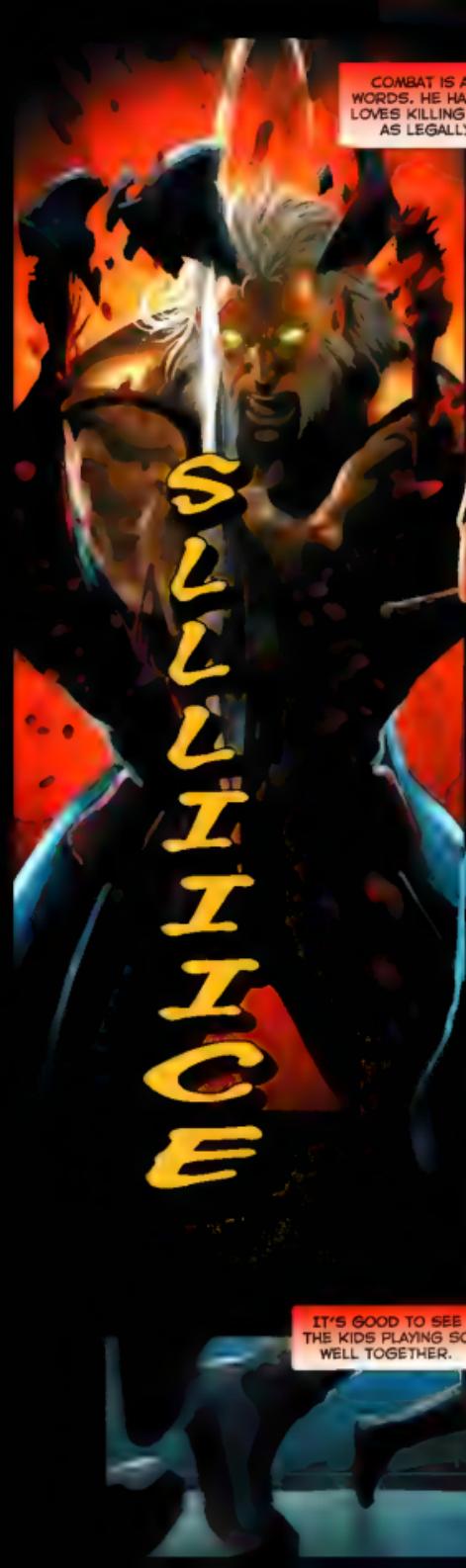
THIS MUST BE WHAT IT'S LIKE FOR
A PARENT WATCHING THEIR BABY
TAKE THEIR FIRST FEW STEPS.



UNFORTUNATELY, IT LOOKS LIKE
THIS "BABY'S" REAR IS EXPOSED.
BUT IF YOU ASK THE BIG FELLA, HE
WOULD SAY HE'S JUST PLAYING
NICE WITH OTHERS.



THIS WAY COMBAT
DOESN'T FEEL
LEFT OUT.



COMBAT IS A MAN OF FEW WORDS. HE HATES EARTH AND LOVES KILLING AS MANY OF US AS LEGALLY POSSIBLE.

S
L
I
C
E



AFTER A BRIEF STINT WITH THE YOUNG-BLOOD DIVISION, HE'S BEEN RE-ASSIGNED TO BLOODSTRIKE. HE'S FLOURISHING UNDER MY COMMAND.



I LOVE YOU TOO, JAR JAR.

IT'S GOOD TO SEE THE KIDS PLAYING SO WELL TOGETHER.

HEAVY ARTILLERY HAS BEEN DISPATCHED IN SECTOR 5. IT LOOKS LIKE THE DEEPER WE PENETRATE THIS COMPOUND, THE MORE RESISTANCE WE'RE BOUND TO ENCOUNTER.

LUCKILY FOR US,
COVERT AGENTS
ARE IN PLACE...

AND HAVE BEEN
DISPATCHED.



HE'S A LOOSE CANNON WHO IS ALWAYS
TESTING MY LIMITS. WE'VE BUTTED
HEADS FOR YEARS, BUT HIS HOMICIDAL
TENDENCIES MAKE HIM IDEAL FOR THIS
OPERATION. HE'S A REANIMATED WEAPON
OF MASS DESTRUCTION THAT I GET TO
UNLEASH ON OUR ENEMIES...

IF THIS TEAM IS MY KIDS, DEADLOCK
WOULD BE MY PROBLEM CHILD. A FORMER
MEMBER OF THE SUPER-HUMAN TERRORIST
FORCE KNOWN AS THE FOUR, HE DIED
DURING A PRISON ESCAPE. UPON DEATH,
HE WAS ADMITTED TO PROJECT: BORN
AGAIN AND PLACED UNDER MY COMMAND.



THE COVENANT OF THE
SWORD. THESE MEN ARE
THEIR SOLDIERS.

OUR MISSION IS TO PREVENT THE
PROLIFERATION OF NUCLEAR
WEAPONS BEING DEVELOPED BY
THE NORTH KOREANS AND EXPOSE
THEIR TIES TO THE COVENANT.

SHRAK



SHOULD DEADLOCK RUN INTO ANY PROBLEMS WE HAVE AN ACE UP OUR SLEEVE.

WHICH ONE OF YOU IS GOING TO GIVE ME A DECENT FIGHT, HUH?

DEADLOCK, I HOPE YOU WEREN'T TALKIN TO ME.

NOT MUCH IS KNOWN ABOUT HER, EXCEPT HER ABILITY WITH A BLADE IS SECOND TO NONE. AND WHEN DEALING WITH THE COVENANT OF THE SWORD, SHE'LL HELP US CUT DOWN THEIR RANKS.

THAT IS IF SHE AND DEADLOCK DON'T KILL EACH OTHER FIRST

LETHAL, IT'S ABOUT TIME YOU SHOWED UP. LEAVE IT TO A WOMAN TO SHOW UP FASHIONABLY LATE TO A PARTY.

GIVE ME A BREAK. IF I HADN'T SHOWN UP WHEN I DID, THEY WOULDN'T CALL YOU DEADLOCK. THEY WOULD JUST CALL YOU DEAD.

BUT FIRST, HOW ABOUT WE HELP THE REINFORCMENTS? WHAT DO YOU SAY?

LETHAL, MY OTHER COVERT AGENT. WE TANGLED IN THE PAST WHEN SHE WAS HOOKED UP WITH MY BROTHER'S OUTFIT, BRIGADE. SINCE THEN, SHE'S WISED UP AND JOINED THE WINNING TEAM AND I COULDN'T BE HAPPIER TO HAVE HER.

DARLIN', I COULD LISTEN TO YOUR SWEET PILLOW TALK ALL NIGHT...

REMIND ME TO KILL YOU LATER.

"CONSIDER IT A DATE, LETHAL."

TROLL LEADS THE REINFORCEMENTS INTO BATTLE. ON LOAN FROM THE YOUNGBLOOD DIVISION, BARTHOLOMEW J. TROLL IS PROVING TO BE A VALUABLE ASSET.

CLEAR THE WAY, GUYS! IT'S TROLL TIME!

GET READY TO MEET YOUR MAKER, YA CREEPS!

NOT ONLY IS HE SKILLED IN HAND TO HAND COMBAT, BUT WITH LITERALLY CENTURIES OF EXPERIENCE UNDER HIS BELT HE IS A MASTER STRATEGIST.

AT LEAST THE TWERP IS WHEN THE HE'S NOT DOLLING OUT ATTEMPTS AT WITTY BANTER.

THAT JOKE IS AS GERIATRIC AS YOU OLD MAN.

THIS OLD MAN COULD YOU TEACH YOU A THING OR TWO, TOOTS.

BEFORE WE CONSUMMATE THIS THING WITH THE COVENANT, HOW 'BOUT A LITTLE FOURPLAY?

FOURPLAY HAS BEEN WITH ME JUST AS LONG AS DEADLOCK, AND HAS BEEN RESURRECTED THANKS TO PROJECT: BORN AGAIN JUST AS MANY TIMES.

THEN THERE'S LYNX. THE DEPOSED LEADER OF JAKARRA. COMES FROM THE SAME RACE AS YOUNGBLOOD'S COUGAR.

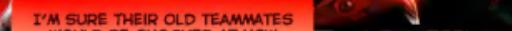
I WAS NEVER A CAT PERSON. MOM AND DAD DIDN'T ALLOW ME OR JOHNNY ANY PETS, BUT LYNX MAY HAVE JUST FOUND HERSELF A HOME WITH US.

THIS KITTEN HAS CLAWS.

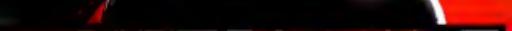


WITH THE REINFORCEMENTS TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS IN SECTOR 5, I SEND OUT OUR NEWEST RECRUITS TO DO A SWEEP OF SECTOR 6 AND GET SOME VALUABLE FIELD TIME.

KODIAK AND BYRD. A COUPLE OF FORMER MEMBERS OF THE NEWMEN.



I'M SURE THEIR OLD TEAMMATES WOULD BE SHOCKED AT HOW THEY'VE CHANGED. BUT THE COVENANT OF THE SWORD DOES NOT DESERVE COMPASSION.



I HAD MY RESERVATIONS ABOUT THEM JOINING, BUT THEY HAVE PROVEN TO BE ABLE TO ADAPT TO MY METHODS QUICKLY. THEY'RE EAGER TO IMPRESS THEIR NEW FAMILY.



THEY INFILTRATED THE INFRASTRUCTURE OF PROJECT: BORN AGAIN IN THE PAST AND LED TO THE DEMISE OF THE ORIGINAL BLOODSTRIKE TEAM.

ROAR



AS FAR AS I'M CONCERNED, THEY ARE A PLAGUE THAT NEEDS TO BE ELIMINATED AT ALL COSTS. THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS TOO MUCH FORCE.



THIS IS OUR MISSION.



LIKE I SAID, THERE ARE NO SHADES OF GREY. THERE ARE JUST WHITE HATS AND BLACK HATS.



AND OUR MISSION NEVER ENDS.



IMAGE UNITED ISSUE THREE

ROBERT KIRKMAN

ROB LIEFELD

JIM VALENTINO

TODD McFARLANE

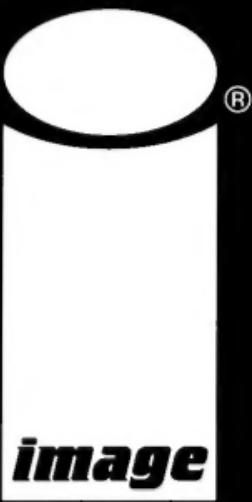
ERIK LARSEN

WHILCE PORTACIO

MARC SILVESTRI

JANUARY





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